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Indonesia's Schools and Participatory Governance in the Reformasi Era

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Abstract

Indonesia's primary schools have long been criticised for poor education services despite the establishment of school committees in 2002. School committees are participatory governance institutions for the involvement of pupils' parents and other stakeholders in the decision-making processes at schools. While the literature documents the merits of such institutions in several cases, school committees have not brought about significant improvements in the education services offered at Indonesia's primary schools. By analysing relevant statutes and stakeholders' accountability awareness and behaviours, it is argued in this paper that several contextual factors have impeded school committees from performing optimally in the 2002–2016 period. In pilot areas where non-governmental organisations experimented with new tactics, however, there were signs of improvement, rekindling hopes for the future. These findings enrich not only the scholarly understanding of governance reforms in Indonesia's education sector, but they also add to academic discussions on participatory governance in transitional democracies.

Keywords: participatory governance, primary school, stakeholders, NGO, Indonesia

1 Introduction

Many observers state that Indonesia has the potential to be a populous country with a prosperous economy, but few believe the goal will be achieved soon. Among factors frequently mentioned in reports, education deserves attention, for it is concerned with human quality. Indonesia's schools have long been criticized for poor education services, but that does not mean the government has done nothing to improve these problems. A variety of reform initiatives have arisen in the past two decades. Given this, the central question of this paper shall be: Why have reform measures not turned Indonesia into a country with great high-end laborers? This essay's goal is to offer an answer by analyzing school committees (*komite sekolah*) at Indonesia's primary schools.

Education services at primary schools deserve attention, for they directly affect the performance of Indonesia's next generation. Due to the compulsory education system, all school-age children in Indonesia are obliged to study at primary schools. As such, the quality of school governance matters not only to the maintenance of facilities but also to students' value system (Palmier, [1983](#)). School committees, as a part of Indonesia's governance reform initiatives after 1997, are the few institutions featuring the extensive involvement of stakeholders (Hsieh, [2016](#)). By analyzing school committees, we can observe how citizens interact with civil servants and how participatory governance institutions work in a transitional democracy. This paper focuses on the 2002–2016 period because school committees started operating in 2002. Its statutory source, the *2002 Ministry of National Education Decree on Education Boards and School Committees* (Kepmen. 44/[2002](#)), remained valid until the *2016 Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation on School Committees* (Permen. 75/[2016](#)) was issued.¹ Furthermore, in the 2002–2016 period, the *Public Information Disclosure Act* (UU. 14/[2008](#)) was promulgated to improve the institutional conditions of participatory governance.

¹ The Indonesian Ministry of Education was the “Ministry of National Education” until 2011, and now is called the “Ministry of Education and Culture”



In this current study, we argue that school committees were not strong participatory governance institutions, and the statutory flaws and unreadiness of stakeholders were to blame for this outcome. In pilot areas where Education Coalition activists experimented with new tactics, signs shortly arose that were conducive for improvements in participatory governance. The following sections further present and explain these arguments. Section Two presents a review of relevant literature on participatory governance, which is followed by a discussion on Indonesia's primary school problems and reform initiatives in Section Three. The fourth section gives an in-depth analysis of the operation of school committees, and conclusive remarks are contained in the final section.

2 Literature Review: Participatory Governance

Governance usually refers to the structure concerned with the operation of organizations of all types (Frederickson, [2005](#); Hughes, [2010](#)), and good governance thus means the ideal conditions organizations are expected to reach. Scholars vary widely in their assessment criteria (Bouckaert & van de Walle, [2003](#); Frederickson, [2005](#); Hughes, [2010](#); Huther & Shah, [1998](#); Weiss, [2000](#)), but most agree that accountability is essential (Maile, [2002](#)). Understood as a relationship between persons obliged to explain their actions and ones with entitlements to demand the fulfilment of such obligations (Pollitt, [2003](#)), accountability is enforced through a variety of mechanisms and institutions (Cendón, [1999](#)). While various scandals suggest limitations of conventional accountability mechanisms (Malena, [2009](#)), there are initiatives made to address and supplement current mechanisms (Goetz & Jenkins [2001](#); Jenkins & Goetz, [1999](#); Pande, [2007](#); Reinikka & Svensson, [2005](#)). Among reform initiatives, establishing participatory governance institutions attract wide attention (Devarajan & Reinikka, [2003](#); Goetz & Jenkins, [2001](#); Jenkins & Goetz, [1999](#); Peruzzotti & Selee, [2009](#); Wang, [2002](#); World Bank, [2003](#)).

Participatory governance institutions feature the involvement of stakeholders in the formulation of decisions that could affect their lives, with the recognition of their rights to contribute (Malena, [2009](#)). Although many claim the extensive involvement of stakeholders in policy formulation enhances effectiveness, such institutions unavoidably attract resistance from within, for extensive involvement changes normal operation modes and renders insiders' information accessible to others. Nevertheless, factors such as changes in the ruling political party (Baiochi et al., [2011](#)), arising democratic awareness (Fukuyama, [1996](#)), changes in the administrative system along with decentralization (Donaghy, [2013](#)), and interests of political elites (Andersson & van Laerhoven, [2007](#)) make participatory governance institutions popular.

Moreover, several studies have shown the merits of participatory governance institutions at improving the government's responses to citizens' needs and at tightening the interactions between them (United Nations Development Programme, [2002](#)).

Participatory governance institutions vary in several aspects. Some are concerned with the formulation of budgets and other decisions essential to organization operations; others are concerned with the oversight over the services they provide (Malena, [2009](#)). Deliberation and accountability are shared elements of participatory governance institutions, and both are subject to mechanisms and participants. While all participants show their capacity and willingness to engage in deliberations and to enforce accountability, as they are legally entitled to do, good governance is likely to take place. The case of local school councils in Chicago, USA, demonstrates the importance of mechanisms in relation to functioning participatory governance institutions (Russo, [1995](#); Shatkin & Gershberg, [2007](#)). Before the 1980s, Chicago was notorious for low teaching quality and other poor governance problems at public schools. Local school councils were formed as a response to criticisms, according to the 1988 Chicago School Reform Act (Fung, [2001](#); Fung & Wright, [2001](#); Gamage & Zajda, [2009](#)). Local school councils are participatory governance institutions because, in addition to the principal and two teacher representatives, they must include six pupils' parents and two community representatives. These councils are also school accountability institutions because their entitlements include overseeing school budgets, approving school improvement projects, and evaluating the principal's performance before renewing contracts (Briffault, [2005](#); Easton & Storey, [1994](#); Gamage & Zajda, [2009](#)). Accordingly, stakeholders can participate in the formulation of decisions concerned with critical school affairs, and this has led to solving the poor school governance problems mentioned above. Success stories have attracted emulation, and studies on them have confirmed a positive correlation between participatory governance institutions and improved school governance (Briffault, [2005](#); Bryk, [1998](#); Fung & Wright, [2001](#); Ryan et al., [1997](#); Shatkin & Gershberg, [2007](#)).

Participatory governance institutions' performance also hinges on participants. Shatkin and Gershberg ([2007](#)) listed principals, pupils' parents, and NGO activists as critical participants. They believe institutions function optimally while principals actively promote parental participation, pupils' parents obtain meaningful decision-making power, and NGO activists provide training and engage in advocacy campaigns. Such ideal scenarios rarely take place, however. This is partly because each participants' thoughts and behaviors are subject to cultural, institutional, and historical factors.



3 School Governance in Indonesia: Problems and Reform Initiatives

1. Problems

Indonesia's education sector has a vast number of stakeholders, but it has long been under criticism for not offering quality service.² Criticisms of teachers, for example, include problems such as poor teaching quality (Irawan et al., 2007; Zulfikar, 2009); severe teacher absenteeism and minimal enthusiasm (Toyamah et al., 2010; Usman et al., 2007); subservience to superiors and reluctance to change (Bjork, 2005). More often than not, corruption takes place. In a survey, more than half of the Indonesian respondents believe that corruption is quite severe in the education sector, and nearly a quarter of respondents once experienced being asked for bribes (Khouw & Lim, 2001). Together with poorly maintained school buildings and other infrastructure-related problems (Mishra et al., 2004), students in Indonesia are generally in a poor learning environment. One critic, Legowo (2004), put it thus:

Regardless of type, degree, or scope, Indonesian education is considered insufficient to inspire the public. This is reflected in the fact that there are always criticisms of, complaints of, and demands for Indonesian education-related policies, management, and services... Few (or even no) people have heard praises for policies, management, and services related to Indonesian education. (pp. 43–44)

² In the 2017–2018 school year, there were 35,612,230 students and 1,485,602 principals and teachers in secondary and primary schools, amounting to 14.1% of Indonesia's total population (Pusat Data dan Teknologi Informasi, [n.d.](#)).

The problems above are partly legacies of authoritarian rule. Before the start of the Reformasi period, the Indonesian people had experienced authoritarian rule for more than 40 years. The authoritarian government promoted values such as obedience and harmony and instilled them into citizens through intimidations, restraints, and other means (Anderson, [1983](#); Lane, [2009](#)). Indonesian citizens, therefore, generally lack experience in negotiating and mediating with government officials or civil servants and were used to acquiescing abuses (Masduki, [2006](#)).³

The teachers, principals, and parents of pupils at schools shared the inclinations and attitudes above, as evidenced by an investigation conducted in 1997 by Christopher Bjork ([2005](#)). He found that Indonesian teachers mostly perceived themselves as civil servants accustomed to succumbing to the opinions of directors or principals, and as such, not willing to take responsibility. Further, teachers interacting with pupils' parents and other stakeholders in neighboring communities was rare⁴:

Indonesian schools have not traditionally invited or responded to the input of everyday citizens... like most public institutions, schools have operated with a sense of independence from their surrounding communities. There are no institutionalized mechanisms for facilitating school-home communication. Parent-teacher conferences are not written into school calendars. School festivals are usually closed to the community, and teachers do not invite parents to campus to observe classes. Institutional practices, as well as the tacit signals communicated to parents, underline the idea that education of Indonesia's youth should be entrusted to teachers, and that parents should not interfere in that process... parents were valued for the financial and material contributions they made—but such donations did not earn them

- 3 Such values were embedded in bureaucratic culture. Civil servants in Indonesia are mostly citizens who pass examinations, and examinees' track records were under review during the authoritarian era. Examinees who had ever criticized government policies or joined opposition groups hardly passed the review, suggesting that most civil servants were obedient. Civil servants were repeatedly asked to respect and obey their superiors and were not allowed to form trade unions. They automatically became a member of the Indonesian Public Servant Organization (KORPRI) which emphasized members' obligations to vote for the Golkar, a political machine backed by the authoritarian government, during elections. Demands above shaped the workplace culture within the Indonesian government, and civil servants who survived were thus accustomed to obedience and lacked a sense of innovation and responsibility (Dwiyanto, [2006](#); Legowo, [1999](#)).
- 4 The problem of low participation of pupils' parents in the formulation of decisions at primary schools similarly occurs in Islamic boarding schools (Epstein, [2010](#)).



any influence over school management, practice, or curricula... [The Parents' Association for School Support (Badan Pembantu Penyelenggara Pendidikan, BP3)] existed in virtually every Indonesian school... [and their] primary function... was to raise funds to support school activities. Teachers and administrators depended on these contributions, which in theory were voluntary, to subsidize educational programs, materials, and special events. It would have been quite challenging for most schools to operate without [the Parents' Association for School Support's] support. The individuals who made financial contributions, however, did not regularly meet to discuss school-related issues. (pp. 123–124)

Pupils' parents in Indonesia generally acquiesce and tolerate such treatment (Widoyoko, [2010](#), p. 172–173). Several factors led to such responses, including their understanding of civil servants' low-pay situation. Though there had been many raises, Indonesian public servants have endured low wages for decades, leading to compassion among the general public (Filmer & Lindauer, [2001](#); Tanzi, [1994](#)).

The Indonesian governments have initiated several programs to improve school governance after the start of democratization. Some were aimed at enhancing civil servants' welfare, and most were done by Indonesia's teacher unions (Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia, PGRI). However, such initiatives alone hardly guarantee improved school governance. As such, they need to be supplemented by mechanisms to strengthen oversight and increase transparency, and many believe in the merits of the involvement of stakeholders in such mechanisms (Maile, [2002](#)). Furthermore, a variety of reform initiatives were made in the Reformasi era to meet such expectations, and they are briefly discussed in the next subsection.

2. Reform Initiatives

The School-Based Management (SBM) policy was the most-known education reform initiative at the start of the Reformasi era. The policy represents policymakers' attempts to include stakeholders in administrative reforms. With the expectation to transform schools into financially independent and self-managing educational units, school personnel were counted on because they presumably knew more about local educational problems than government officials and had an incentive to lobby for more resources and to innovate (King & Cordeiro Guerra, [2005](#)). Under this policy, school principals had more authority over school management, and the general public was encouraged to participate in educational affairs actively (Sumintono, [2009](#)). This policy was not

new to Indonesia, for the Indonesian government had encouraged parents and teachers to participate in educational affairs before the Reformasi period (Bjork, [2005](#)). However, low institutionalization problems made their participation merely symbolic, unlikely to bring about substantial progress (Bjork, [2005](#); Cohen, [2000](#)). In the Reformasi period, along with a series of decentralization policies⁵, the Ministry of Education showed attempts to increase the involvement of teachers and schoolchildren further in school-concerned activities. School committees are the institutions created for that purpose.

Ministry of National Education Decree No. 44 of 2002 (Kepmen. 44/[2002](#)) is the statutory source of school committees. The decree, consisting of four clauses and two appendices, stipulates that school committees are established by the initiative of community members, education units, and local governments. Moreover, they are independent oversight institutions that monitor civil servants in schools on behalf of the public.⁶ Several subsequent decrees and laws also contain clauses relevant to school committees and stipulate committees' power over revising curricula, nominating principals, and others.

However, Bambang Sumintono ([2009](#)) has argued that applicable regulations fail to convey clear messages. He criticized *Decree No. 44/2002* for not clearly explaining school committees' "functions, tasks, role, and authority," and argued that these flaws "can be taken to mean that there is no clear legal standing for the parties who are involved" (p. 48). He also complained that the decree does not specify who is responsible for, and can be involved in, establishing school committees. This lack of specification may lead to a legitimacy problems and tension between communities and local governments. Additionally, he criticized the use of the phrase "can use" (*dapat menggunakan*) in the decree for implying that obeying that decree and its appendixes is not compulsory. Because of these shortcomings, Sumintono has suggested that school committees are likely to encounter problems such as varied, even contradictory, interpretations of the same articles.

Furthermore, relevant laws and regulations do not entitle school committees to implement the duties of the school. Unlike local school councils in Chicago, USA, which hold entitlements to evaluate principals' performances and school budgets (Fung & Wright, [2001](#); Gamage & Zajda, [2009](#)), school committees in Indonesia are only allowed to participate in the selection of principals. *Ministry of National Education Decree No. 44 of 2002* (Kepmen. 44/[2002](#)) does not offer a clear explanation of the authority vested in school committees, and subsequent resolutions also failed to do so. *Ministry of National*

5 Decentralisation in Indonesia began in 2001. Several personnel and finance-related authorities were evolved to local governments and were no longer monopolized by the central government.

6 See the preamble of the Decree



Education Decree No. 162 of 2003 on Guidelines for Appointing Teachers as Principals (Kepmen. 162/[2003](#)), for example, offers school committees only a minor role in appointing school principals. Such an arrangement per se is not necessarily a problem. However, in Indonesia's context, several factors are likely to make the appointments problematic, including widespread bribery during the recruitment process and the low integrity problem of superintendents.⁷ Moreover, subsequent regulations did not offer school committees authority over the assessment of school principals' performance. Both *Decree No. 44/2002* and the later *Regulation on School Committees* (Permen. 75/[2016](#)) stipulate that school committees can discuss school budgets with school officials and give advice, to create a transparent, responsible, and democratic environment in schools. However, no regulation offers school committees the authority to impose sanctions on officials who obstruct their participation and oversight in the selection of contractors and other activities related to school financial affairs (Irawan et al., [2004](#)). The absence of the above provisions makes transparency at schools unlikely to take place.

Though the establishment of school committees represents the consistency of Indonesia's school governance reforms with the current trend of administrative reforms, the derogation of the provisions of the law hinders its development.⁸ Sumintono ([2009](#)) believes that such shortcomings reflect the low level of trust of Ministry of Education officials in the ability and willingness of teachers and pupils' parents to conduct oversight. NGO activists blamed such shortcomings for the closed decision-making process (Irawan et al., [2007](#)).

Power imbalances in the formulation of [education policies render] low participation of teachers in the process, not to mention the public and pupils' parents...The Ministry of Education is responsible for formulating the education policy, but its attitude is to discourage participation, closure, and irresponsibility.
(pp. 37–40)

In summary, statutory sources did not explicitly offer school committees the authority required to enforce accountability at schools. Regulatory authority is crucial in Indonesia's context because, as mentioned above, teachers and

⁷ See Napitupulu, [2012](#)

⁸ In the recent two decades, Robert B. Denhardt and Janet V. Denhardt ([2000](#)), as well as several other scholars have developed the New Public Service (NPS) theory. They emphasized that the governance system should be citizen-centered, different from the traditional public administration theory that emphasizes the responsibility of civil servants to superiors. They also devised the New Public Management (NPM) theory which values how the government steers the society. In [2015](#), they claimed that the New Public Service model has become a paradigm, and the establishment of school committees shows that Indonesia has caught up with this trend.

pupils' parents have long been absent in the formulation of decisions at schools and even were unwilling to exert accountability of education service providers. They, thus, need guidelines, more explicit than ever, to tell them explicitly what powers they hold, what projects can be supervised, which channels can be used to make faculty responsible, and what kind of sanctions will be imposed on faculty members who are not responsible. While statutory sources fail to do so, it is difficult for school committees to be robust participatory governance institutions.

How did school committees develop in such an unfavorable context? The answer to this question relies on third-party observations, and the next section uses the Education Coalition's investigation outcomes and its activists' experiences to show how school committees operated in the 2002–2016 period.

4 School Committees: Practices and Effects

The Education Coalition, consisting of several Jakarta-based NGOs, has been under the coordination of the Indonesia Corruption Watch⁹ since its formation in 2003 (Ichwanuddin et al., [2006](#)). Education Coalition activists blame the low involvement of pupils' parents and other stakeholders in the school-related decision-making process on corruption, poor education quality, and other problems. With the perception that the low involvement of stakeholders in the decision-making process leads to poor school governance problems, Education Coalition activists have sided with teachers and pupils' parents since the beginning (Education Coalition activist, J. Paat, personal communication, October 21, 2009; A. Irawan, personal communication, February 5, 2008). Education Coalition conducted a series of investigations in the 2003–2008 period in order to understand to what extent stakeholders feel satisfied with education services, how well they understand school committees, and to what degree they are involved in the formulation of decisions at schools.¹⁰ Their investigation activities were mostly in Javanese cities, including Jakarta, Garut, and Tangerang in West Java, and Surakarta in Central Java. Activists could only conduct a selective investigation because of limited resources. Nevertheless, their investigation outcomes help others to have a close look at the actual development of school committees in the 2003–2008 period.

9 The Indonesia Corruption Watch is an advocacy NGO famous for its anti-corruption campaigns. Its Public Service Monitoring team is in charge of mobilizing stakeholders to eliminate corruption at schools (A. Irawan, personal communication, October 14, 2009).

10 The Belgium-based 11.11.11. offered the Indonesia Corruption Watch around 669 million rupiah to finance projects initiated by the Public Service Monitoring Division in the period 2003–2008 (T. Masduki, personal communication, February 21, 2008).



During 2002–2008

As shown in Table 1, a high percentage (37.6%) of local respondents in Jakarta had never heard of school committees. Given that information flows quickly in the capital, and also that related policies had been advertised in newspapers for years, such an outcome was satisfactory. Moreover, nearly 60% of respondents perceived that school committees and the Parents' Association for School Support were the same thing. More than half the respondents thought that school principals hold power to decide how many members school committees should have and who could fill vacancies (see Table 2). The above understandings are incorrect according to the *Ministry of National Education Decree No. 44/2002* (Kepmen. 44/[2002](#)), which states that school committees are autonomous, different from the Parents' Association for School Support, and shall have more than nine members.

Table 1. Public Awareness of School Committees

	Teachers (%)	Parents (%)
Have Heard of School Committees	92.2	58.8
Never Heard of School Committees	6.8	37.6
No Response	1.0	3.6

Note: Data from Irawan et al. ([2004](#), p. 89).

Table 2. Public Understanding of School Committees

Question	Teachers who said yes (%)		Parents who said yes (%)	
	Aug. 2003	Feb. 2004	Aug. 2003	Feb. 2004
Q1: Are school committees...				
the same as BP3?	58.5	58.6	59.0	59.9
different from BP3?	34.8	35.4	27.0	25.7
No Response	6.7	5.9	13.9	14.4
Q2: Are school committees...				
autonomous?	39.0	31.4	38.0	43.3
organized by school?	61.0	68.6	62.0	56.7
Q3: Is the number of school committee members...				
at least nine?	47.6	23.5	36.7	30.0
decided by schools?	52.4	76.5	63.3	70.0

Note. BP3 = Badan Pembantu Penyelenggara Pendidikan [The Parents' Association for School Support].

Data adapted from Irawan et al. (2004, pp. 91–93).

Education Coalition activists blamed the Ministry of Education as responsible for stakeholders' poor understanding of school committees. Irawan et al. (2004) noted that the Indonesian government had advertised the SBM policy on televisions since 2000, but complained that the advertisements did not explain the concept clearly:

[Advertisements] only reflected the government's desire to raise funds from the public. Advertisements suggested that participation equates sponsoring damaged schools with making donations. Such content made the people afraid and reluctant to participate in the management of school affairs. Teachers learned what School-Based Management is from briefings from principals and newspapers. However, many teachers only know about, rather than understanding, the School-Based Management, because such presentations were brief and did not involve the participation of all teachers. (p. 81)



Such misunderstandings suggest the absence of motivations among stakeholders to improve school governance through school committees. The participation of pupils' parents and teachers in school committees had not changed significantly after the implementation of the SBM policy. According to a national survey conducted by the World Bank in 2010, more than 80% of respondents have never participated in school committees and other school activities (Chen, [2011](#)). Given this, school committees are unlikely to enhance the accountability of school principals to stakeholders (J. Paat, personal communication, October 21, 2009). School principals remained in a dominant position, and, in numerous cases, they assigned their friends or relatives to be school committee members (Rosser et al., [2011](#)).¹¹ As a result, critical information, like budgets and expenditures, remained publicly inaccessible. Education Coalition activists in Irawan et al. ([2004](#)) put it this way:

[The formulation of the school budget] is dominated by the principal. For example, in the fundraising process, items and the amount are determined by principals, leaving no room for negotiation for pupils. The annual gathering of pupils' parents is only an occasion for fundraising. The school never announced the amount of the grants it received from the government and its purpose. Instead, what is usually mentioned is the funding gap that requires parents to fill. (pp. 103–104)

In addition to the findings above, the investigation by the Education Coalition also reveals some other noteworthy points. First of all, teachers had more profound involvement in school affairs than pupils' parents, and such participation varied across regions. When teachers in Garut, Tangerang, and other areas criticized school governance issues through several media platforms, negotiated with school principals on budgets, and formed teacher unions, few teachers in Jakarta acted similarly (J. Paat, personal communication, October 21, 2009; A. Sugandi, personal communication, October 25, 2007). Education Coalition activists perceived the high living pressure in metropolitans as the leading cause of the variances above (J. Paat, personal communication, October 21, 2009). Second, the low involvement of pupils' parents in school affairs might have been the outcome of economic choices. Johnston ([2005](#)) has suggested that a free-rider mindset prevails while public goods are involved. Accordingly, while improved education quality is a public good, not many pupils' parents are willing

¹¹ A World Bank survey revealed that more than 90% of the principals interviewed believed that they had considerable influence in planning and distributing school funds; additionally, nearly half of the school committee members interviewed acknowledged themselves having no substantial influence on school funding planning and allocation (Chen, [2011](#)).

to contribute their efforts to that end. The absence of willingness is justified while there are concerns about retaliation their children may encounter. Such scruples indeed existed during the authoritarian era (Rosser et al., [2011](#)), and they have remained in the Reformasi period. As Education Coalition activist Jumono stated (personal communication, November 8, 2007):

We have not succeeded in changing the unbalanced power relationship between school principals and school committees. It is because there have not been enough parents who dare to challenge school principals. Many parents are willing to attend street demonstrations or file complaints. However, they will rarely directly question and challenge school principals. It is because they fear that the school principals and teachers whom they question, or challenge will retaliate by bullying their children.

Finally, some minor improvements in school governance were identifiable after school committees were introduced. One survey by the Education Coalition reveals that more than half of respondents replied that information related to curriculum or extracurricular activities was published more often than ever at primary schools; moreover, about 80% of respondents had once discussed pupils' learning problems with school principals (Irawan et al., [2007](#)).

Education Coalition activists initiated several activities to address obstacles to active school committees. They published survey outcomes in the form of booklets and distributed them for free in workshops and at other occasions (see Table 3). At the same time, activists also endeavored to organize and mobilize teachers and pupils' parents. Through training programs, the Education Coalition trained participants to collect evidence, to analyze data, to understand regulations, and to write reports. Additionally, the Education Coalition recruited volunteers as agents to take the initiative to communicate with other stakeholders at campuses (see Table 4). These agents were pupils' parents residing in the activity areas or adjacent regions, who, thus, were familiar with local schools.¹²

¹² The Education Coalition only subsidized agents and their activities in Jakarta due to fund limitations.

**Table 3.** Some of Indonesia Corruption Watch's Publications

Year	Book Title (Bahasa Indonesian)	Book Title (English)
2004	Mendagangkan Sekolah: Studi Kebijakan Manajemen Berbasis Sekolah (MBS) di DKI Jakarta	Trading Schools: Studies of School-Based Management (SBM) Policy in Jakarta
2006	Saatnya Warga Melawan Korupsi: Citizen Report Card (CRC) untuk Pendidikan	It Is the Time for Citizens to Fight Corruption: Citizen Report Card for Education
2007	Buruk Wajah Pendidikan Dasar: Riset Kepuasan Warga Atas Pelayanan Pendidikan Dasar di Jakarta, Garut dan Solo	The Ugly Face of Primary Education: Research into Public Satisfaction with Primary Education Service in Jakarta, Garut, and Surakarta
2008	Penyiasatan Anggaran Pendidikan 20%	An Investigation into Education Budgets

Note. Data from Indonesian Corruption Watch ([n.d.](#)).

Table 4. Education Coalition's Agents

Name	Areas	Schools Covered
Jumono	East Jakarta	SMPN 213 Klender SMPN 139 Standar Nasional Klender SDN 19 Malaka Jaya SDN 06 Malaka Jaya SDN 02 Klender
Sahuri	Central Jakarta	SDN 03 Mangga Dua SDN 01 Mangga Dua
Manaf	North Jakarta	SDN 04 Tulang Bawang SDN Warakas SDN 01/02
Yusuf	West Jakarta	MIN Petukangan SDN 01 Petukangan Selatan SDN 05 Petukangan Selatam SDN 010 Jembatan Tiga

Note. Data from A. Irawan (personal communication, February 3, 2008).

The Education Coalition's efforts led to a dramatic increase in the number of complaints that the coalition itself received. An example is the Indonesian Corruption Watch. The number of complaints about fraud at schools it acquired in 2004 was only 25, but this number increased yearly (see Table 5). It received 253 complaints in the 2004–2007 period. This number looks insignificant, but it outnumbers the respective number government agencies received. Among 885 complaints received by the National Ombudsman Commission in 2007, only eight charges were about problems within the education sector.¹³ By thinking positively, this increase in complaints can suggest the awakening of the sense of accountability among teachers and pupils' parents. However, Education Coalition activists expressed concerns over it because this increase might also suggest stakeholders' heavy reliance on the Education Coalition to improve school

¹³ The National Ombudsman Commission in 2007 received a total of 885 complaints, of which only eight were related to the Ministry of Education. A lack of information likely indicates that all complaints were related to corruption at schools (Komisi Ombudsman Nasional, [2008](#)).



governance. Education Alliance activists, thus, had reiterated on different occasions the importance of teachers and pupils' parents to initiate their accountability actions and even denounced excessive reliance on NGOs. Nevertheless, stakeholders' reliance on NGOs to enforce accountability changed little in the 2003–2008 period, implying that the pre-set goal had not been reached (Jumomo, personal communication, November 8, 2007).

Table 5. Complaints Received by the Indonesia Corruption Watch (2004–2007)

Year	From Jakarta	From Outside Jakarta	Total
2004	5	20	25
2005	11	32	43
2006	16	36	52
2007	24	109	133
Total	56	197	253

Note. Data from A. Irawan (personal communication, November 11, 2007).

During 2008–2016

Unlike the investigation-centered strategy taken in the preceding period, a new approach was taken by Education Coalition activists in the 2008–2016 period. It featured a collaboration with various stakeholders, including school principals, in school governance. The idea of “a sound and harmonious relationship between schools, school committee, and citizens is the key to solving all school problems” underpinned this change (Rosadi et al., 2011, p. 78). The participatory school budget campaigns (Gerakan APBS Partisipatif) they launched since 2008 featured experimental trials (Wisudo, 2011b). Considering geographical proximity, familiarity with local conditions, and experience, Education Coalition activists chose Garut Regency (West Java) and Tangerang City (Banten) as pilot areas and selected ten schools in each area to experiment with the new strategy (Wisudo et al., 2011).

In the pilot areas, considering most pupils' parents were farmers, the Education Coalition invited specialists to teach courses on organic agriculture (Wisudo, 2011b). They also assisted targeted schools in applying for subsidies required for repairing ruined school buildings. These activities looked unrelated to school governance but were essential to the expansion of networks, which are

critical to participatory school budget campaigns. At the same time, the Education Coalition continued to hold symposiums¹⁴ and training camps, and such events widely attracted teachers and pupils' parents, ones who had never participated in them (Fajar, [2011](#)).

At the beginning of the experiment, the Education Coalition encountered various challenges, including the low willingness of residents in pilot areas to participate in events, and residents questioned activists' purposes (Wisudo, [2011a](#); [2011b](#)). Local government officials' resistance was stiff as well. For example, in Garut Regency, some local government officials insisted that schools were only accountable for budgets and other school affairs to local governments and relevant authorities, not to pupils' parents or other stakeholders (Wisudo, [2011b](#)). For activists, such responses reflected their anxiety about the impacts of participatory school budget campaigns on officials' interests.

Years of efforts brought about changes, especially after 90% of schools the Education Coalition assisted received subsidies for repairing damaged school buildings. These results have demonstrated the cruciality of NGOs' assistance, and not only increased the Education Coalition's reputation but also altered stakeholders' attitudes towards it (Fajar, [2011](#); Wisudo, [2011b](#)). Many teachers and pupils' parents had since taken pride in being part of the participatory school budget campaigns, and Education Coalition activists believed that mutual trust and friendship with residents had started to form (Wisudo, [2011b](#)). Furthermore, there were rising demands by the pupils' parents for the disclosure of information at schools. Schools that satisfied such needs won the trust of the public, thus encouraging other stakeholders to participate in school governance more than ever before (Wisudo, [2011a](#)). In short, a virtuous circle gradually took shape.

The participatory school budgeting mechanism operates as follows: First, an investigation is conducted on students' expectations and teachers' needs, and the results are discussed within school committees. Next, in the plenary session, pupils' parents and other stakeholders deliberate over issues submitted by school committees and make decisions. Finally, a resolution paper is posted on the schools' bulletin boards in the following school year (Wisudo, [2011a](#)). Cases reveal the consistency of such a mechanism even though participants may change. According to Education Coalition activists, by 2011, participatory school budgeting had been fully implemented in three targeted schools, while the remaining schools witnessed increased participation and transparency (Wisudo, [2011b](#)). Given that the Education Coalition provided the same assistance, the variances above are attributable to the different attitudes and behaviors of stakeholders (Rosadi et al., [2011](#)).

14 The symposium was held in a residential activity center in Tangerang City, on January 14, 2008.



The Education Coalition's campaigns were in a favorable context after the Information Commission started operation.¹⁵ In 2011, the Education Coalition suspected five schools in Jakarta of misappropriating School Operation Assistance (Bantuan Operasional Sekolah, BOS) subsidies, and they demanded the disclosure of documents through the Information Commission. Though the petition was granted, the principals of the five schools unanimously refused to act as required (Wedhaswary, [2011](#)). This forced the Education Coalition to file a lawsuit (Sobri, [2012](#)). This case suggests that institutional reforms do not automatically bring about changes as might be expected, and that the actions to make change take place remain crucial.

In summary, the Education Coalition's collaborative experiments in pilot areas received positive responses from stakeholders in school governance. While the interaction with stakeholders improved, resistance and anxiety were replaced by enthusiasm and pride in enforcing accountability. Together with the improved institutional context after the establishment of the Information Commission, Indonesia's setting in the 2008–2016 period was more favorable to good school governance than ever.

5 Conclusion

Education matters, and Indonesian governments in the past two decades have initiated several reform measures to promote school governance. The establishment of school committees is one such action, but as discussed in the preceding sections, factors like statutory flaws, poor understandings of regulations, authoritarian legacies, and anxiety about retaliation impeded school committees from performing optimally. As a result, principals remained in a dominant position at schools, and teachers and pupils' parents seldom had deep involvement in school affairs, let alone the ability to exert oversight or enforce accountability. To change such conditions, the Education Coalition adopted new tactics after the mobilization approach failed to bring about significant changes in the 2002–2008 period. In the 2008–2016 period, activists endeavored to work closely with principals, teachers, and pupils' parents in an attempt to create an atmosphere conducive to participatory governance institutions at primary schools. This new strategy succeeded in several targeted schools in the Education Coalition's pilot areas, as shown by the formation of virtuous cycles. In short, NGOs acted as a significant participant in the critical moment of Indonesia's primary school reforms.

¹⁵ See Butt ([2013](#)) for more discussions of the Information Commissions at local levels.

The findings above enrich the scholarly understanding of administrative reforms in Indonesia's democratization era. On this issue, the current literature is either about institutional designs or political elites' will, leaving the question of how mechanisms featuring the involvement of stakeholders in the formulation of decisions within bureaucracy operate unanswered. This paper fills the gap by looking into school committees established to improve school governance. As shown in the preceding sections, both the cultural and institutional contexts in which school committees were established were unfavorable to their operation. It was NGOs that drove change, which shows the significance of civil society in turning Indonesia into the empowered deliberative democracy that Rodgers (2010) has suggested. Despite this importance, limitations in resources quickly put NGOs in a dilemma, and little time was available for activists to make choices. Their choices sometimes mattered not only to themselves but also to reform as a whole.

The findings above expand discussions on participatory governance. School committees are such a type of institution, and their establishment was widely expected to be a copy the Chicago experience in Indonesia. However, as analyzed in preceding sections, a variety of factors impeded school committees from performing optimally. In this situation, initiatives by outsiders matter. Without their efforts, it is hard to estimate when school committees will function effectively. This Indonesian experience suggests the importance of NGOs to participatory approaches to administrative reform in the context of transitional democratization.

The findings above also enrich academic discussions on NGOs' accountability activities. The advantages of having NGOs initiate such activities and the strategies they employ receive in-depth analyses through varied case studies (Ackerman, [2005](#); Arroyo & Sirker, [2005](#); Grimes, [2008](#); Joshi, [2008](#); Mainwaring, [2003](#); McNeil & Malena, [2010](#); McNeil & Mumvuma, [2006](#); Mercer, [2002](#); Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, [2006](#); Smulovitz & Peruzzotti, [2000](#)). As Sing ([2012](#)) states, "the participation of civil society [will] promote good governance" (pp. 91–92). However, the current literature is more about accountability activities by NGOs on their own, rarely analyzing how their efforts to mobilize stakeholders to enforce accountability. More often than not, taking actions by oneself is easier than mobilizing others to act similarly. This paper, then, fills the gap by analyzing the Education Coalition to show what challenges NGOs may encounter, what opportunities they can seize, and what adjustment options deserve consideration.



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